



Questions and Answers Regarding Hydraulic Fracturing

Basic Information

Q: What is hydraulic fracturing?

A: The propagation of fractures in a rock layer caused by the action of a pressurized fluid.

Q: Why is hydraulic fracturing needed?

A: To increase the flow of oil or gas from the reservoir rocks to the producing well.

Q: Why are such high pressures needed for hydraulic fracturing?

A: The fluid pressure must exceed the lithostatic pressure, or the weight of the overlying rock, plus the rock strength. As a result, deeper layers and stronger rocks require more pressure.

Q: Is hydraulic fracturing a recent invention?

A: No, it has been used since 1947 on oil and gas wells as well as some water wells that depend on fracture flow instead of an aquifer layer.

Q: If hydraulic fracturing has been around so long, what happened in the last few years that caused it to be in the news so often?

A: Technological advances in the last 20 years allowed horizontal drilling to become very efficient, and multi-stage hydraulic fracturing in these wells allows significant production from non-conventional oil and gas resources. This has caused a modern oil and gas boom in several states. New fracturing techniques and high oil and gas prices also encouraged development of these resources that were previously overlooked.

Q: What are non-conventional oil and gas resources?

A: Resources that require more than the conventional well drilling and production activities. These include:

- Shale gas, such as found in the Marcellus Shale in Pennsylvania, the Barnett Shale in Texas, or the Fayetteville Shale in Arkansas.
- Shale oil, such as found in the Bakken Shale of North Dakota and Montana.
- Coal bed methane, such as found in Alabama, Colorado, and Wyoming.
- Tight sandstone for oil or gas, such as found in the Pavillion Field of Wyoming, is also a non-conventional resource. Instead of horizontal wells, however, it is produced through very densely spaced (5 to 10 acre) vertical wells that are

fractured with specially designed fluids. The term “tight” refers to the lack of permeability due to natural cementing agents in the sandstone.

Q: Does Idaho have shale gas or coal bed methane resources that require horizontal wells and multi-stage hydraulic fracturing?

A: These resources have not been discovered in Idaho, so horizontal drilling has not occurred and is not being proposed. The gas resource discovered in Payette County is a conventional natural gas reservoir, in which the sandstone reservoirs are not tight. This is similar to hundreds of others developed across the U.S.

Q: So why then is hydraulic fracturing listed in the rules in Idaho?

A: If unconventional, tight resources are found in Idaho, rules are in place so the development of the resources will be regulated.

Q: Are the rules sufficient to address shale gas or other non-conventional resources if they are discovered in Idaho?

A: Yes. The rules are comprehensive enough to cover these activities. Provisions were included that allow additional regulation if the proposed activities include non-conventional oil and gas development.

Q: Will Idaho have a boom like North Dakota is currently experiencing?

A: Probably not. The known field in the Western Idaho Basin is much smaller than the Williston Basin in North Dakota and Montana.

Q: Has hydraulic fracturing occurred yet in Idaho for oil and gas?

A: No. To date, Idaho has not received any applications for hydraulic fracturing.

Ground Water and Hydraulic Fracturing

Q: What is in the fluid used for hydraulic fracturing?

A: It depends on the oil and gas reservoir depth, geology, and other physical characteristics. It also depends greatly on the objective of the hydraulic fracturing treatment. Following is a list of the common types of materials that are often used. Other materials are used as needed, some due to site specific conditions or needs.

- Carrier fluid, usually water, to pressure up and create the fractures.
- Proppant to hold the fractures open (sand, ceramic beads, etc.).
- Thickening agent to increase fluid density and allow proppant to be carried along.
- Crosslinker to increase temperature range of thickening agent.
- Friction reducer to allow fluids to be pumped more efficiently.
- Biocide to kill potentially harmful bacteria.
- pH adjuster to keep other materials functioning.
- Breaker to slowly break down the gelling agents.

- Surfactant to increase fluid recovery.

Q: Is diesel used for hydraulic fracturing?

A: Not legally after 2005. As detailed in a congressional report by Representative Waxman, several companies did continue using diesel from 2005 through 2009. These were essentially unpermitted Class II injection wells that the EPA has not acted on.

Q: Will toxic chemicals be used in Idaho?

A: Toxicity is based on dosage and response. Idaho water quality standards for surface and ground water must be followed, so nothing can be placed in groundwater that will exceed the water quality standards established by the Department of Environmental Quality.

Q: The website www.FracFocus.org is difficult to maneuver. Why can't IDL post the information on its website?

A: Most companies operate in multiple states. Having them report to a centralized database allows the public to go to one site to track a specific company or to track trends in various states. The Groundwater Protection Council is currently redesigning the FracFocus website to make it more user friendly.

Q: Why can't industry be required to list all ingredients rather than it being a systems approach of reporting?

A: Idaho Code (Title 74) protects specific formulations under proprietary information. A systems approach is a decoupling of trade names and percentages to allow for full disclosure of chemical ingredients, without the possibility of reverse engineering the proprietary blend.

Q: Will hydraulic fracturing fluids be put into the ground water?

A: Not into ground water as most people define it. The hydraulic fracturing fluids are only used in the target oil and gas reservoir. The well must be tested prior to the fracture treatment to make sure it is constructed properly and will not leak into the rocks above the target oil and gas reservoir. The rules also require that fractures be kept at least 500 vertical feet above or below the lowest fresh water aquifer as an added measure of protection. Due to the rock stresses at depth, fractures grow farther horizontally than they do vertically. The oil and gas reservoirs may also contain some water, but that water likely contains elevated total dissolved solids and other naturally occurring materials that make it unsuitable for use.

Q: What causes most of the problems associated with water contamination from hydraulic fracturing?

A: Studies recently published in the National Academy of Sciences confirm eight (8) contamination cases (Pennsylvania & Texas) were a result of poor oil and gas well

construction, specifically with cement seals and casings. Mismanagement of fluids on the surface can also contaminate. These problems are not a direct result of the hydraulic fracturing itself, but are due to poor oil and gas practices. The rules for Idaho properly address both of these issues. Some states require reporting after a fracture treatment. Idaho rules go beyond reporting by also requiring agency review and approval of an application.

Q: Will hydraulic fracturing make natural gas come out of people's faucets?

A: No. A properly constructed oil or gas well will protect drinking water. The rules require testing of a well's construction to make sure it will not leak into the shallow aquifers used for domestic water. Some water wells already have problems with natural gas due to improper water well construction or naturally occurring biogenic gas in the shallow subsurface.

Q: What is biogenic gas?

A: Biogenic gas is produced by microbial bacteria and is a naturally occurring phenomenon. A stable isotope analysis will distinguish it from thermogenic gas, which is what the oil and gas operator is trying to produce. Thermogenic gas is buried deeper and has gone through a natural maturing process due to the earth's heat.

Water Usage

Q: Can the oil and gas operator just pump out some groundwater and use it for the hydraulic fracturing?

A: No. A valid water right must be used. The small volumes potentially needed could be purchased from nearby landowners or municipalities.

Fluid Disposal

Q: If Class II injection wells cannot be used, how will the fracturing fluids be disposed of?

A: They must be tested after the hydraulic fracturing to determine if the fluids picked up any harmful constituents during the fracture treatment. The operator must then dispose of the fluids at an appropriate facility.

Q: What harmful constituents could the hydraulic fracture fluids obtain during the process?

A: It depends on the specific geology of the gas reservoir. In other states, fracture fluids have picked up chlorides and other salts that make disposal difficult. Some fluids have picked up naturally occurring radioactive materials.

Q: Can infiltration pits be used for disposal?

A: No. All pits used for oil and gas exploration and development must be lined.